



Maj. Jeneen Johnson, U.S. Army Garrison Kaiserslautern Emergency Services director, fingerprints her 11-month-old son, Gage, May 24 for a ChildPrint ID Kit that was distributed during the garrison's National Missing Children's event.

Kaiserslautern remembers missing children

KAISERLAUTERN, Germany – Nickie Bergeman simply reached up to grab something from the top shelf at a stateside commissary. By the time she turned around, her 18-month-old son was missing. “It takes that quick,” said Bergeman, snapping her fingers, “for someone to steal your child.”

Fortunately, Bergeman recovered her son, now 18-years-old, but the memory of that day prompted her to help organize the U.S. Army Garrison Kaiserslautern’s National Missing Children’s Day event held May 24 on nearby Landstuhl Regional Medical Center.

Nearly 100 children and their parents attended the two-hour event, learning how to stay safe, whether on- or off-base.

“As long as we teach our children how to be safe – ‘Stranger Danger’ – that’s the only thing that matters,” said Bergeman, who has been the garrison’s Safe Neighborhood Awareness Program volunteer coordinator at LPMC for almost four years.

Since 1983, the United States has observed May 25 as National Missing Children’s Day, which is the anniversary of when 6-year-old Ethan Patz disappeared in 1979 from a New York street corner on his way to school. He remains missing.

The remembrance shows a nationwide commitment to help locate and recover missing children, and as a reminder for parents, guardians and other trusted-adult role models to make child safety a priority, said Maj. Jeneen Johnson, the garrison’s emergency services director. “What’s important once a child goes missing is to have appropriate identification. That’s not common place in a family environment. That’s what we wanted parents to be aware of,” said Johnson, explaining why the garrison hosted the event.

Appropriate identification includes parents maintaining a copy of their children’s Deoxyribonucleic Acid, commonly known as DNA. This is as simple as putting several strands of children’s hair in a plastic bag and keeping it in a freezer, Johnson noted.

Such tips, as well as what information will be needed by law enforcement officials were consolidated for parents in ChildPrint ID Kits that were handed out free during the event. The kit contains an ink strip for parents to fingerprint their children and a chart for dentists to annotate any identifying dental features. It also has a place for parents to write down any identifying characteristics their children may have, such as scars, dimples and birth marks.

Written boldly on the kit is the important fact that there is not a waiting period required to report a missing child to the police. Fire safety was also emphasized at the event with the garrison’s fire department performing the Sesame Street Muppet Show, as well as how to put out fires using different types of fire extinguishers. Additionally, Girl Scouts of America Troop 202 in Landstuhl sponsored a question-and-answer game regarding safety, as well as assisting with the event.

Story and photo by Christine June
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